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OBITUARY NOTICES OF MEMBERS DECEASED.

JOSEPH MILLER WILSON, A.M., C.E.

(Read May 1, 1903.)

To meet Joseph M. Wilson in ordinary intercourse afforded an opportunity to learn of the good, true and beautiful in human nature; to know him better, in relation to the sciences and arts, was a privilege fraught with instruction, aid and a constant progression onward and upward toward greater knowledge of things as they are; to know him spiritually, to recognize the Holy Spirit of Truth within him dominating all else, was to feel the influence of that more profound, ennobling, holier enlightenment, based upon sincerity and Divine purpose, which "shines reflected in the human face."

To adequately appreciate the strength and force of character which lay back of his admirable work, it is important to recall some of the conditions which brought it about, for, from the varied standpoints of heredity, individual endowment, education and opportunity, Mr. Wilson was favored above many, and the excellent use he made of what he possessed appeals to the very best that philosophy can recognize.

Joseph M. Wilson was a worthy member of a long line of men eminent in professional walks of life, notably as experts in the engineering profession, each of whom had made his mark in public service by ability founded upon integrity, and inspired by a progressive spirit which, while ignoring nothing in nature, conserving the best from the past, ever led onward toward the further betterment of men and things.

His earliest American ancestor was Robert Gibbes (1644-1715), who came from his native place, Barbadoes, to the Province of South Carolina; was Chief Justice of that Province (1708) and Governor (1710-1712). His great-great-grandfather was James Wilson, an engineer and architect of Stirling, Scotland, whose son John Wilson (1755-1798) was Lieutenant in the Seventy-first British Foot (Highlanders), and served throughout the American Revolutionary War as an engineer under Major Moncrief, of the Royal

Engineers ; was wounded at the siege of Charleston ; later on married there a daughter of Dr. Robert Wilson, a prominent physician of that place, and eventually returned to Scotland.

In the next generation, John Wilson (1789, Scotland-1833, America), the grandfather of the subject of this sketch, having completed his education at the University of Edinburgh, returned (1807) to his mother's native land, and entered upon the profession of engineer and surveyor in Charleston. His professional thoroughness and accuracy are matters of record to this day. A map of South Carolina made by him for the State Government is yet considered the standard authority for all but subsequent improvements. He became a naturalized citizen of the United States at an early period, and during the war with Great Britain (1812) served as engineer for the construction of the works of defense of the city of Charleston ; held office of State Civil and Military Engineer for South Carolina under Board of Public Works (1818-1822), and in 1826 removed to Philadelphia, from which time Major John Wilson became identified, as Chief Engineer, with that extensive system of improvements for the State of Pennsylvania which during his life materialized in the Philadelphia & Columbia Railroad. Of his son, William Hasell Wilson (1811-1902), who followed directly in his father's footsteps, the important and enduring work performed by him is still fresh in the memory of many yet living. He was closely identified with the onward march and development of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company's system from its very infancy, when with his father's corps in 1826 ; through the formative period of the organization, when the standard was set for high achievement which has since obtained ; through the Civil War period, when, as Chief Engineer of the Pennsylvania Railroad, his Department of Maintenance and Construction was called upon to preserve intact the highway itself for the transportation of armies and munitions of war as well as the general public and freight traffic ; through to the end of a professional career, embracing many positions of trust and responsibility, of exceptional usefulness and duration (actual service, seventy-six years). William Hasell Wilson was finally looked upon as the Nestor of his profession, respected, honored, followed, served by many a younger man of his own corps who can to-day rise up and call his name blessed. Such were some of the influences which operated upon the subject of this sketch.

Joseph M. Wilson possessed by heredity those inestimable privileges and advantages which come from things of good repute in professional life and practice. He was keenly sensitive in upholding the high standard and family traditions thus bequeathed unto him, and he did so with a constancy and fidelity unto himself quite above the control of policies and politics, either secular or religious, which he did not approve.

Born at Phoenixville, Pa. (June 20, 1838); passed a portion of his youth upon his father's farm, Chester county, Pa.; attended private schools, and entered the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, N. Y. (September, 1854). After graduation, with degree of C. E. (1858), took a special course of two years in Analytical Chemistry with Prof. F. A. Genth, at Philadelphia, and in March, 1860, entered the service of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company as Assistant Engineer.

His services with that company covered the important period when the introduction of cast and wrought iron, and later on steel, in lieu of the previous wood-construction for bridges and buildings, involved much original research and experiments more or less novel to the profession. Mr. Wilson was among the early investigators to apply such in actual practice, and became a valued source of information and experience in each of the three departments of this development, viz., mathematical investigation involving the theory of strains, the development of designs, and work executed. His technical papers, published then and later on, form part of the history and literature of the profession in the United States. He held various positions in the service of the company in line of promotion, and as Engineer of Bridges and Buildings embraced opportunities involving increased responsibility by the embodiment of new ideas in construction.

He continued in that service until 1886, during which time he constructed, among many works, the original Broad Street Station, Philadelphia, which for purity in design was eminently characteristic of him.

As early as 1873, when the National Congress and citizens at large became interested in the approaching international celebration of the first centennial of the nation, Mr. Wilson at once took an active part, both as citizen and professionally. Later on, after the adoption of the design for the Main Building, which was finally erected in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, he became associated with

the writer of this sketch in the building thereof. The Machinery Hall, the first of such dimensions and pretensions in the history of the country, was subsequently designed and erected under similar auspices, Mr. Wilson taking the leading part.

The execution of works having international significance and relations in any field of effort is apt to produce a desire, an impetus to greater comprehensive effort, embodying collateral information and more extended professional skill and practice. Mr. Wilson embodied this progressive spirit in a pre-eminent degree, his qualifications for such progress being excellent, his standard of the highest, his spirit confident. His success which followed is associated with that of his brothers, under the firm-name of Wilson Bros. & Co. (organized 1876), of which he was for many years the senior member. The scope of his work in this relation embraced a field exceptionally large, under auspices much varied, and in locations far distant in other countries; the variety of information necessary to attainment not confined to technical matters, but involving special studies of diverse character, not a few of which resulted in published papers giving much specific data for reference as well as professional opinion. Some of these papers were prepared to aid philanthropy in general, and not only those engaged in the actual construction of buildings. The scope of his work thus became in time very extensive.

Whether in the designing and erection of hospitals or of banking buildings, of comprehensive systems of shops for railroad corporations or structures for industrial enterprises; whether buildings for administrative purposes or Union Depots; whether as engineer or architect, in consultation or for expert testimony, in reference to elevated railways in cities, the water-supply of cities, or the mammoth suspension bridges connecting adjacent centres of population; whether as engineer of subways under municipal control, or as trustee for carrying out of bequests to institutes for the education of future generations; whether as President of the Franklin Institute for ten years, or as member of learned societies, both at home or abroad; whether as author of technical papers for the British Institution of Civil Engineers, London, or as an American author bringing home from France and England his study of trade-schools to improve their construction and administration here—in all these Joseph M. Wilson took part.

His constant desire was for a more comprehensive and advanced

knowledge of actual facts and powers in nature, ever with a view to their direct application in new phases of work, and this kept him in touch with investigation in many fields.

He was never visionary; imagination was not his strong point, not even in his moments of relaxation, when music (the organ in particular), painting or photography were cultivated because of the fine-art appreciation which they called for. Yet few recognized more than he what scientific research contains, potentially, for further advancement by co-operation toward the revelation of truth in unity.

From his point of view this was the highest ideal as to material things, *per se*, demanding constant touch with the progress of the age, and treatment both subjective and objective in life-work.

To study, control and utilize the forces of nature was his business in life, and he did so according to the most approved methods. If this were all, this tribute to his memory might well close at this point with one phrase: a man of high cultivation and refined feeling, an eminent engineer, whose works do follow him. With him, however, this was not all. It was not all of life to live and work—not by any means, neither in science nor religion.

To those who knew him best his personality was most sympathetic, responsive and pure in communication. He was never idle, but constantly seeking in the domain of fine art and kindred fields to gratify a refined taste and keen appreciation of the beautiful as well as the good and true, thus producing impressions which appealed through their spiritual import. These traits characterized his moral nature as forcibly as the more exact sciences and arts appealed to his intellect. His numerous descriptive manuscripts of travel, containing sketches and illustrations drawn on the spot from nature, are as a mine of wealth to those left behind. These studies of nature in its refined aspects—the optimism in nature—touched a chord which vibrated with still higher harmonies. With him the progressive spirit was not only onward but upward toward the eminent domain of theologic aspect—theology the queen of all sciences.

No one realized his own limitations better than himself, but the ideal he ever held before him was fundamentally not subject to limitations, being neither more nor less than the Divine Personality who had said unto him, "I am the way, the truth and the life. Follow me." This dictum was to Joseph M. Wilson the most profound

yet comprehensive, from any point of view, ever uttered to humanity. He endeavored to lead the life thereby called for, and his works certainly do follow him, as he followed that ideal. He was kindness and love itself, even unto self-sacrifice—constant and enduring in good effort.

In one word, the life and career of Joseph M. Wilson manifested in well-balanced harmony the two conditions, material and spiritual, which call forth the best within a man as the wisdom of this age now perceives the truth in things as they are—viz., a sound, reasonable basis (scientific) for physical needs and intellectual life in all he studied, designed, advocated and executed—this being an up-to-date application of truth as natural science now recognizes it; also, a marked spiritual discernment of truth progressive as manifested in and through the religious consciousness of humanity under the ever-active ministry of the Holy Spirit of Truth in man himself—an inner life of good thoughts, giving utterance in good words, good deeds—an example of one who did follow in sincerity onward and upward toward the brightest and best.

Mr. Wilson married (1869) Sarah Dale Pettit, daughter of Judge Thomas McKean Pettit; great-granddaughter of Col. Charles Pettit and of Commodore Richard Dale, of Revolutionary memory, and of Chief Justice and Governor Thomas McKean, signer. He left one daughter, Mrs. John T. Gibson, of New York.

His domestic virtues were as beautiful, steadfast and altruistic as his professional life was admirable, sincere and progressive. He passed away in full belief of that higher existence in which there is "activity for all our powers, and power for all our activities."

March 23, 1903.

HENRY PETTIT.